

MALAYSIA'S PRODUCT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Introduction

The Product Certification Program, Malaysia's national environmental labeling program, was launched in 1996 by the Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM). It is a single-attribute, seal-of-approval product certification program. As of March 1997, SIRIM's certification activities were delegated to a fully-owned subsidiary, SIRIM Quality Assurance Services (SIRIM QAS). This delegation was undertaken to avoid any conflicts of interest with SIRIM's other activities, namely testing, research, standards development, and measurement services. SIRIM consults regularly with the Ministry of Environment, which is in charge of Malaysia's overall environmental policy. Although SIRIM is not directly under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment, SIRIM strives to coordinate its programs with Malaysia's official environmental policy in this way.

SIRIM plans to develop (by 1998) certification criteria for lighting and appliance energy-efficiency, as well as detergent biodegradability. To date, however, its only fully-developed product criteria, published in July of 1996, are for CFC-free refrigerators. The impetus for developing these criteria was the Montreal Protocol, which called for the phasing out of CFC usage worldwide. The Malaysian government responded by imposing a deadline of 1999 for the complete phaseout of CFC use. However, Malaysian refrigerator manufacturers that had developed CFC-free refrigerators before the deadline found themselves suffering from market share declines attributable to the higher prices they had to charge for the more expensive CFC-free technology. These manufacturers sought the certification to help consumers differentiate among manufacturers' environmental performance and to encourage consumers to support the CFC-free technology despite the higher prices. One large domestic manufacturer has had its entire product line certified. SIRIM is currently working to certify a second manufacturer's refrigerators. Because of the 1999 phaseout, however, it is expected that the CFC-free certification will become obsolete and will eventually be phased out as well.

Program Summary

Selection of product categories begins when a request for a product category is submitted by the public. Though anyone can request product categories, manufacturers wishing to promote their own products are usually the ones submitting requests. Certification requests may be prompted by demand in either the domestic or export market. Most Malaysian refrigerators, for example, are bought and sold domestically. However, the requests for detergent biodegradability labeling and lighting and appliance energy-efficiency labeling were driven by Malaysia's large export market. SIRIM then selects product categories based on market presence and potential benefit, determined through discussions with both consumers and manufacturers.

Product criteria are established by an internal committee of SIRIM professionals who consult foreign certification programs for information on similar products. These criteria are then presented to a government-appointed advisory board composed of various stakeholders including the government, professional bodies, and trade associations. Through a consensus-based decision-making process, the criteria are revised and released, officially launching the certification program. After their release, the criteria can be revised again at any time by the advisory board, which meets at least three times each year.

Participation in the program is completely voluntary and open to both domestic and foreign-made products (although, to date, no submissions have been made from foreign producers). SIRIM evaluations require an at-cost fee, and include both product testing at SIRIM's in-house lab, and site visits to assess the manufacturing process.

Upon certification, manufacturers receive a certificate listing the manufacturer's name, the certified product's brand and model, and details of its main components. The certificate also specifies the type of certification issued. The certificate allows holders to print the certification category (e.g., "CFC-Free") on product labels. Certificate holders are subject to continued surveillance through annual inspections by SIRIM, to ensure that certified products continue to satisfy the requirements of the certification program.

Program Methodology

SIRIM's product certification program is a single-attribute, seal-of-approval program. Product categories are submitted by the public (including manufacturers) and chosen based on market demand for product certification, as assessed through periodic discussions held with consumers and manufacturers. Product criteria are based on a single environmental attribute, such as being CFC-free, energy-efficient, or biodegradable. The certification process involves both on-site inspections and product testing by SIRIM employees.

Other Information

In a separate environmental management system (EMS) certification program, SIRIM has made reciprocal arrangements with two foreign certification programs in the interest of companies who export to or from Malaysia. One arrangement is with the Japanese Audit and Certification Organization for Environment (JACO), with whom SIRIM conducts joint facility inspections for EMS certification. Since many Japanese companies have Malaysian branches, this arrangement reduces the expenses for Japanese and Malaysian inspectors conducting EMS certification. SIRIM has another arrangement with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) in which Malaysian companies, inspected by SIRIM according to CSA standards, are granted the CSA's EMS certification. This arrangement is highly beneficial to Malaysian manufacturers because of the

large volume of Malaysian exports to North America. This system makes it possible for Malaysian companies to obtain EMS certification that is more widely recognized in North America where they conduct the bulk of their business, without the expense of flying CSA inspectors from Canada to Malaysia.

Malaysia has had significant involvement in ISO activities, having been a member of ISO Technical Committee 207 since 1994 and also a member of each of the three sub-committees, of which SC3 deals with environmental labeling. The Malaysian ISO delegation consists of a 16-member committee, including one SIRIM representative.

A number of industries, namely textiles, timber, dyeing, rubber, and electronics, have developed private industry-specific environmental management certification programs. The private Malaysian Timber Industry Board has also proposed a timber certification program and conducted a limited pilot program. National labeling standards for such products may be developed by SIRIM in the future, though there are no concrete plans to do so as of yet.

References

Heinke, Gary W. et al., *Final Report: Development of an Eco-label Certification Programme for Hong Kong/ RC96-19*. Hong Kong: Research Centre of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, June 1996.

Raj, Rajinder, General Manager of SIRIM QAS. Personal communication with Abt Associates, Summer 1997.

SIRIM. *Certification of CFC-Free Freezers and Refrigerators*. August 1997.

Product Categories

Final Categories

Refrigerators

Under Development

Detergents

Appliances

Lighting fixtures

